The Path towards Action

Our Experience
The Path towards Action

Protecting Through Education
This document is a result of the Regional Project that RET International implements in Costa Rica with financing from the United States Department of State Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (BPRM).

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Madiba Youth Group (Jóvenes Madiba in Spanish) has been a constant presence during RET’s work in Costa Rica even before it settled on its current format and name. It began as a group of adolescents and youth with a deep desire to learn and develop, with thousands of ideas and concerns buzzing through their heads. The group is a combination of local youth with their own aspirations and displaced young people that have arrived to a new country that is different from their own, ready to accept the challenge of creating a new life.
The extraordinary potential of these young people, now called Madiba Youth Group, has been accompanied and promoted by RET in the framework of a Regional Project and is supported by the organization’s institutional mission. This collective is full of dreams, questions and a desire to learn. They have become a mirror for the work of the organization, and above all a challenging space that forces RET – what a beautiful obligation! - to create innovative proposals and unique and challenging educational strategies that promote the creation of useful, playful and interesting tools that are rapidly changing, just like young people’s dreams. Madiba Youth Group has been key to the integration process for local young people and displaced persons. The group is growing and makes us grow as an organization.

This publication is a source of pride and admiration for RET. The leadership on this path traveled has been taken over by the Madiba Youth Group who uses their life stories and interests as human rights advocates, acting as participants and protagonists of diversity and creators of their dreams. It is a path that is constantly pointing towards finding more and more young people and a growing number of experiences that become permanent individual and collective life skills.

We are very appreciative and want to continue learning together with the aim of travelling in many different directions, accompanied by all of the voices from the Madiba Youth Group.
“Madiba has made me see life from a different perspective than what I used to have. For example, accepting people as they are and not judging a person without getting to know them. I taught myself that diversity is what makes this world wonderful and it means that it is full of new things to discover.”

- Angie H. -
INTRODUCTION
¡WE ARE YOUNG PEOPLE!
The young people of Costa Rica between the ages of 12 and 35 represent 42% of the total population. [1]

We have our own dreams, ideas and projects. We also have a vision of the world and the energy to fight for a more just society.

People say that “young people are our country’s future” but we are much more than that. We have the capacity to think, decide and act. We are not just the future, we are also the present!

We have to act if we want a more just world that is governed with respect and offers truly equal opportunities.

The road is long and we have to confront stereotypes that mean we aren’t taken seriously, young people’s problems are invisible to the rest of the society and we have to deal with existing and unfair social structures that aren’t allowed to be questioned. We are diverse in gender, ethnicity, nationality, social class, age and interests. Despite our substantial differences we have been able to work as a team, which is proof that we can integrate and organize ourselves, discuss ideas and plan constructive actions.

We train ourselves to become the Madiba Youth Group.
The root of our group’s training is RET International, an organization committed to supporting communities to satisfy the educational needs of young people that are vulnerable as a result of displacement, violence, armed conflict and disaster. RET was founded in Geneva, Switzerland in 2000 and has operated in Costa Rica since 2010, developing and implementing projects designed for vulnerable youth, “Protecting through Education” as described by their slogan.

RET in Costa Rica, with international cooperation support, has been focused on: generating socio-economic opportunities; integrating persons in need of international protection; fighting against discrimination, school violence, sexual harassment over the internet and human trafficking; and preventing drugs from being used and trafficked.
One of the projects that RET implemented in Costa Rica upon its arrival to the country is called “Strengthening Capacities to Ensure Humanitarian Assistance and the Social, Economic and Educational Integration of Refugee Families in Ecuador, Costa Rica, Panamá and Venezuela 2012-2015”. The project was designed to integrate young people and their families who are refugees or asylum seekers through empowerment and socio-cultural participation.

This project was financed by BPRM (Bureau of Population, Refugees & Migration) and implemented by RET’s National Office in all of the four countries mentioned. It was technically coordinated and guided by the RET Regional Office for Latin American and the Caribbean under the global supervision of RET International (Geneva Office).
The Madiba Youth Group is the result of the young people’s efforts and the accompaniment provided by RET. It consists of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants coming from Latin America, as well as local Costa Ricans. Most of the members are between 14 and 24 years of age. The group has been progressively getting stronger, acquiring autonomy, developing participation capacities and getting involved with the community.

We are telling our stories in this publication to motivate people who want to get organized into a group, have their voices heard and fight for social transformation, regardless who they are. We don’t claim to offer an absolute truth because every path is different, but we do want to share our experiences and the lessons learnt in the process.

We want to show the path that the Madiba Youth Group has taken and tell our story in a more energetic, active and secure way with the hope that more young people can start this journey, organizing themselves into collectives and participating with words and actions, here and in every other corner of the world.
As we tell the story of our journey, you will find reflections and recommendations that we hope will help strengthen youth organizations as an engine for social transformation based on community advocacy.

RET International has accompanied us for four years and the Madiba Youth Group is becoming more autonomous every day. Every step we take helps us grow and become more independent.

THIS IS OUR STORY
“We never dreamed that the day would arrive when it would be us delivering the talks and the training and all that.”

- Marley -
STARTING TO MOVE FORWARD
Around 2010 we all met each other in some educational centers in Heredia and Alajuela, which are provinces in Costa Rica, as part of RET’s intervention. We were a diverse group of ten young people between 15 and 24 years of age consisting of Costa Ricans and people from other nationalities, migrants and asylum seekers or refugees. We participated in training sessions and activities promoted by RET and we talked about issues such as human rights, leadership and self-esteem, amongst others.

We got to know each other through fun activities and discovered the similarities and differences of our own cultures.

Under RET’s leadership, which had a really relaxed way of doing the training and different activities, a comfortable space was created that helped us get to know each other and establish relationships.
Our work with the arts was critical during this period. We staged a play based on our experiences as displaced persons. We wrote the script and gave life to the characters, calling the production “Our Land, Our Stories”. The play was presented in the Alajuela Municipal Theater. This was our first contact with the community and local authorities. Also, international representatives from RET attended the play to show their support.

This is how we started to recognize our individual capacities. We broke through barriers and our own fears in order to integrate ourselves into different social spaces. We became more active in our schools and dared to talk about our situation with other people.
We also participated in workshops to reduce risks during disaster situations. These workshops were implemented by RET in El Carmen de Alajuela school. We finished the process with a collective mural that we painted at this school.

This stage was characterized by facilitating workshops with the RET team. We accompanied officials to training sessions in schools and communities, and they started gradually giving us the space that we needed to let loose. We started to speak in public, help with activities and share our stories.

Our name, “Chic@s RET.”-(RET Guys and Girls), reflected our close relationship with the organization. At that time we were a group taking our first steps and we needed guidance. We decided to change our name later to reflect our development as a group.
While we built our relationships among the group and in the community, we received training on human rights and life skills, focusing on issues such as: building leadership; socio-cultural integration skills; self-affirmation in diversity; communication; artistic expression; gender equality; team work; and others. This is how we began to work together as a group.

It is important to recognize that the members of our group didn’t always maintain harmonious relationships within the organization we were creating. The reasons were varied. We had to confront a new country, our own problems with integration and those of our families, economic problems and educational and employment challenges. The environment wasn’t always entirely favorable. Even still, we feel that it is important to recognize that, despite the problems, we have always had a core or main group that helped us to continue operating.
Our Challenges

During this stage we developed personal skills and capacities. Our self-esteem and trust in others strengthened. We grew. For those of us that experienced problems like difficulty integrating into the host community, violent situations in schools and others spaces due to being a displaced person and a victim of discrimination and xenophobia, in addition to various family difficulties, it was necessary to find a protective and welcoming space.

We found our place in that group. A place where we could feel comfortable, respected and heard.

Key Concepts

Participation: Process through which young people get involved, take part and position themselves to support the improvement and wellbeing of the group and community they belong to in the broadest sense possible. Participation is achieved through regular attendance and contributing and sharing ideas, initiatives and common activities.

Integration: Process through which young people start to feel that they are part of a group, community or society to being accepted and having their differences recognized, particularly the differences that “unite them”.

Interculturality: Peaceful coexistence process based on respecting cultural diversities. This is characterized by communication and interaction between different people and groups and has the aim of build things together based on their differences.

[2] The concepts presented in this publication were designed through dialogue with the Madiba Youth Group over the course of the project. These young people draw these ideas from their own experiences and reflect on these concepts, with contributions and support from RET. The young people don’t claim that these are complete or official definitions, but they do reflect a progressive appropriation of these concepts.
“A lot of people looked at it like we’d been sent to war, but I feel that really we’ve been given an opportunity.”

- Orley -
“We are doing something good for ourselves and society. We are learning about lots of different issues and also educating others in order to have an equal world without discrimination and without borders”.

- Jhon -
WHERE ARE WE GOING?
We spent two years as "Chic@s RET" when we decided to start our own journey, lead our own processes and take on a more active role in society. RET had taught us the importance of appropriating our own space and how to take the reins of the group. The opportunity had arrived. That moment marked a new point in our history. We adopted a new path that we were going to control. We became the leading players in our own process.

We needed to define our own identity and the first thing we did was to give ourselves a name. We came up with several options, discussed them and selected the one that most united, identified and inspired us: "Madiba Youth Group". Madiba is the tribal name of the former President of South Africa, an activist and human rights advocate that fought against apartheid and racial discrimination in his country: Nelson Mandela. [3]

Just like Nelson Mandela (Madiba), who had big plans and dreams, we started to form our own. We defined our collective mission and vision in the following way.

[3] Born July 18, 1918 in Mvezo, a small South African village, Mandela received this honorary title from the Madiba clan elders that he belonged to, part of the Xhosa people.
Madiba was the name of a Thembu chief who led the Transkei region during the 19th century, which formed part of the Mthatha people’s traditional lands where the charismatic political leader was born. (SOURCE http://www.actitudfem.com/-celebridades/famosos/enterate/por-que-le-decian-madiba-nelson-mandela)
Mission

We are a youth group with members from different parts of Latin America and we work to promote the human rights of young people who are migrants, refugees and asylum seekers and have arrived to Costa Rica. We aim to build a new citizenry through socio-educational processes that understand diversity based on respect and non-discrimination. We look to generate changes in communities of this country by searching for opportunities to promote social equity.

Vision

We want to build ways of citizen participation that include diversity and non-discrimination in order to achieve transformations in our communities, promoting respect for human rights and support for the integration of the young migrants and refugees that arrive to Costa Rica.
To progress in this direction we selected the themes we wanted to work on: culture, education, health and economy; we identified the problems for each one of them, built goals and proposed actions to influence. That’s how our first plan of action was born. These are our most important points:

► **Work** together with Football for Life organization and make championships in the community of La Carpio.

► **Multiply** knowledge on the subject of “The prevention of cyberstalking (grooming) with the purpose of trafficking persons”.

► **Build** a blog and a Facebook page together with Our Voices.

► **Integrate** more young people to the group in a monthly activity.

We started to consolidate as a group of young people with different migratory status: refugees, migrants, residents and nationals; from different parts of Latin America: Colombia, México, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua and Costa Rica; that were looking to lead our own processes of work, deciding on our own group. That’s how we started building a bigger autonomy.

Our new ways of organization and participation also started a change in the roll of RET, that began to figure as an ally and companion of our socioeducative processes, but no longer as the figure responsible, not those directing each of our steps in the process.
“In the beginning of 2014 Nelson Mandela died. I wasn’t part of the group yet, but they told me that the decided to call themselves like him because they admired him. But more than Nelson Mandela, they chose Madiba, it was how he was known in the tribe to which he belonged.”

- Angie G. -
Our Challenges

Our change in approach towards participating more actively and with greater responsibility was not unanimous. Part of the group supported the change and another part wanted to continue under the model where RET was responsible for planning, organizing and leading the processes. The members that resisted leaving that comfort zone preferred to withdraw from the group and those who stayed took on more responsibility.
Key Concepts

**Autonomy:** Leading our own processes involves managing and commitment to those processes. The autonomy of a collective is its capacity or condition to independently implement tasks through consensus.

**Citizenship:** Constantly and actively exercising human rights that go beyond the voting in elections and general involvement in society, based on participation and contributing to the development of the communities. Citizenship is a right, regardless of age and migratory status.

**Youth Organization:** A group of young people that have a joint objective to position their voices, implement advocacy actions and build a better citizenry.

**Community:** A set of people that share the same space or interests and have created certain peaceful coexistence regulations that guarantee cohabitation and contribute to community development, although this doesn't mean that all members are or perceive each other to be similar.

[4] The way these concepts are described refers to how the Madiba Youth Group manages and understands them, based on reflections on their own experiences and contributions from RET. Under no circumstances are the young people trying to represent all of the perspectives for each of these terms.
“The places outside the country where I’ve participated in name of the group have left me great learning skills in communication and leadership… To make an opinion and propose an idea has been a challenge, more than as an individual, as a member of a group, with the responsibility to represent our voice.”

- Luis Carlos -
LEARNING TO WALK
Once we had travelled the path, we had to learn to move and point ourselves in the direction we wanted to go. It was necessary for us to develop individual and group skills and for this we had support from RET and numerous organizations (see graphic). This was how we were able to deliver workshops, learn how to use communication tools and grow in our leadership.
Organizations

- GuanaRED
- Culturas Vivas Comunitarias
- Jóvenes Sin Fronteras
- Voces Nuestras
- Casa Ana Frank
- Fútbol por la Vida
- Conjunto de Niños, Niñas y Adolescentes de Alajuela (CODENA)
- Cenderos
- Consejo de la Persona Joven
- Municipalidades
- Fondo de Población de las Naciones Unidas (UNFPA)
- Masaya Association

Communities

- Pavas
- San Rafael de Alajuela
- San Ramón de Alajuela
- La Aurora
- Belén
- Alajuela
- San José
- Hatillo
- Alajuelita
- Heredia
- La Carpio

Education Centres

- Colegio El Carmen, Alajuela
- Colegio La Aurora, Heredia
- Liceo Edgar Cervantes Villalta, San José
- Colegio Gregorio José Ramírez Castro, Alajuela

Universities

- Universidad Latinoamericana de Ciencia y Tecnológica (ULACIT)
- Universidad de Costa Rica (UCR)
- Universidad Nacional de Costa Rica (UNA)
- Universidad de Ciencias Empresariales (UCEM)
- Universidad Latina (U Latina)

Media

- Radio University of Costa Rica (UCR)
- Radio Alajuela
- Radio Activa
- Facebook
- Blogspot
It was at this time that we felt the need to share the knowledge we had received with other people our own age. We became knowledge multipliers, and it was necessary for us to acquire experience as facilitators so that we could apply participation techniques and methodologies. We had a lot to learn and a strong desire to confront big challenges.

At this point, and working with RET, we created the “No Human Being is Merchandise” manual [5]. This manual is designed to prevent sexual abuse over the internet (grooming) and reduce the risk of human trafficking. This was a project created by young people for young people.

Over the course of this process, which lasted approximately a year, we actively participated in training workshops related to the manual and to strengthen personal tools for the prevention and analysis of the social and cultural causes of these problems. After a detailed consultation phase with participants, we then made valuable contributions to the design of the manual.

As part of the following stage, we received training on basic digital communication tools, which led to the creation of the Madiba Youth Group blog. This blog helped us to publicize our work and attract new people to the group. We also created a Facebook page that has been key to linking up with other groups, forming youth networks, sharing ideas and messages and raising awareness on the issues and progress of our projects.

Although it is true that the blog and Facebook page were inactive for a period of time, the Facebook page has been reactivated thanks to the participation of some members.
During the stage of “multiplying lessons learnt”, and after preparing ourselves to work with student groups to promote the manual, we took on the role of facilitator for students from different educational centers in the socialization and adoption of the manual.

We achieved active participation by leading the facilitation and multiplying our experiences and learning. We were part of the process that resulted in the design and implementation of different initiatives to prevent sexual harassment over the internet, human trafficking, migration, discrimination, gender and sexuality.

We decided to implement community projects by analyzing our local reality. This responded to both our interests and those of the communities. Below there is more information about the initiatives that we are planning and those that continue to be implemented. These are always related to the issues prioritized by the Madiba Youth Group. We established objectives and strategies to implement these initiatives while we worked to achieve greater independence, stronger relationships and improved coordination.
“Madiba has had a big impact on me. It has taught me more about migration in our country, the problems and the clash that people experience as immigrants. The most important thing I’ve learned is that we all have something that unites us as people.”

- Arturo -
1. No to Discrimination, Yes to Integration

This is the most important initiative we have implemented over this period, with substantial participation from the local population. We want to have an impact on the reality of Costa Rica in order to prevent violence and xenophobia.

We facilitated the game “Between Here and There”, which was created by the University of Costa Rica’s Social Research Institute. The game aims to raise the awareness of participants by putting them in the shoes of migrants and refugees. RET supported the creation of this game and it has many elements that are linked to the issue of refugees. We have implemented this game in a wide range of spaces with adolescents, youth and public servants.
We carried out interventions in the street to disrupt everyday life, raise the awareness of bystanders regarding discrimination and promote the values of respect and integration. We carried out this work, and continue to do so, in partnership with the University of Costa Rica’s Social Research Institute mostly on commemorative days such as the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, Love and Friendship Day, International Health Day and International Women’s Day, to name a few. We look for an attractive and creative approach related to each commemorative day to transmit the message that fights discrimination against migrants and refugees.
During the first semester of 2015 we painted two murals featuring messages promoting respect in community spaces near the metropolitan area of San José. These murals featured collectively conceived designs that included messages such as “Diversity Unites Us” and “The Borders are in your Mind”. In order to implement this action, we coordinated with local authorities and negotiated the permits to access the different spaces to complete this project.

An important part of these activities were part of the “What Unites Us” campaign. This is a regional campaign implemented by RET International with contributions from 130 young people in the four countries where the project is implemented. The project carries a message of diversity that invites us to think about what connects us and to focus on the good things about people instead of feeding negative biases and stereotypes. This project was also promoted in Costa Rica through social networks.
“In Merced Park we passed out cards that said ‘Happy Love and Friendship Day’ and we asked the people around to write messages to migrants and we gave them some badges. They really liked the activity.”

- Dayhanna -
2. Community theater

We use theater as a way to create a social bond, promote a culture of peace, generate recreational opportunities and strengthen community work capacities.

Our objective during this first phase was to promote the socio-cultural integration of young migrants and refugees in their host communities. Community theater helped promote young people organizing themselves into groups through cooperative and inclusive methods that contributed to peaceful coexistence.

During the second phase we supported each member of the group to facilitate small artistic and cultural activities, while always promoting a message against discrimination and xenophobia.

Thanks to this initiative we formed the “From Here to There” theater group, involving members of the Madiba Youth Group and the community where we implemented the process. We had support from the “Masaya Association”, which is an organization that specializes in promoting a culture of peace through theater. As a result, we performed the play “12,500 meters above sea level”, which was created by the Madiba Youth Group.
3. Gender and Sexuality

With this initiative we aim to promote equal relationships between both sexes by analyzing gender roles, reflect on structures that promote inequality and provide basic learning on risk-free sexuality.

We designed a training program over four sessions designed for adolescents and youth between 15 and 22 years of age which prioritizes zones with high social vulnerability.

In order to train ourselves on this issue we received talks, engaged in conversations and did individual research. We chose the issues to include in the workshop and the way they would be facilitated. This involved participative and fun activities that were planned and planned again until we felt happy with the result. We subsequently proceeded to design the materials for all of the techniques with RET's technical support. We also contacted community actors and institutions to provide several spaces for these workshops.

At the time of publication of this manual we were finalizing the methodology and hoping to implement it soon.
The Madiba Youth Group became a legal organization shortly before this document was published. As a result, it is not yet possible to evaluate the impact and benefits obtained of this action. What is detailed here are the expectations generated by becoming a legal organization.

We progressively started taking on a greater level of responsibility in planning and implementing initiatives. For example, with each new initiative we took on more logistics responsibilities such as buying refreshments, reserving rooms and convening people to attend. We proposed activities more frequently, which opened up new doors for us. Another important aspect was with the issue of gender and sexuality. We went from delivering workshops designed by other people to facilitating the workshops that we designed ourselves.

The most recent step in this constant learning process was becoming a legal organization to consolidate ourselves as an association. [6] This will help Madiba Youth Group to be recognized as an autonomous actor with our own identity, agenda and operations. This way, RET International in addition to being a figure that accompanied processes, will also be a partner of the group.

[6] The Madiba Youth Group became a legal organization shortly before this document was published. As a result, it is not yet possible to evaluate the impact and benefits obtained of this action. What is detailed here are the expectations generated by becoming a legal organization.
Becoming a publicly registered organization helps us to look for and formalize partnerships with different entities that we can consolidate through our work in order to have access to cooperation agreements and financing for the implementation of projects. New doors are opening up and they give us the possibility to diversify and strengthen our work.

Our relationship with RET International continues to be incredibly important, although we have a greater level of independence. RET International and Madiba Youth Group have the vision to become partners in our daily work. Two independent organizations that work together in a horizontal relationship.

At the organizational level, our new legal figure status us to examine and reorganize our internal dynamic. As part of the process, we established thirteen objectives for the association. Some are framed within the work already carried out and others look towards the future (see Annex).

We defined criteria for people to legally become members of the group and the rights and responsibilities of those people who are part of the association. We also chose a Board of Directors.
There has never been a hierarchy nor established roles in the Madiba Youth Group and the new Board of Directors forced us to begin an important reflection. So far, our work has been distributed according to our possibilities, capacities and availability, always with the support of the entire group.

This flexibility helped us to respond quickly, ensure that we implemented horizontal actions and took advantage of our different talents. Additionally, individual contributions were not equal. There were people who were very active in the group and those that only participated in meetings.

Balancing the legal obligation to create a Board of Directors with the desire to not establish a hierarchy, we decided to hold nominations only for the legal and accounting positions in the organization, so that the decisions continue to be made by the entire group.

Our internal dynamic is constantly changing and we consider it important to open up spaces for personal and group self-reflection and analysis. This allows us to recognize positive aspects and take actions to solve negative issues. As a result, we have developed principles related to how we work as a group. Even though these are currently being designed at the time of publication, some of these include: sincere respect; wholehearted commitment; punctuality; group decisions being made by the people that are present at the time; and prohibiting the use of drugs or alcohol in group activities.
Our challenges

We understand and exercise non-traditional leadership. This means that we lead without hierarchies, always respecting dialogue and horizontality and going beyond the individual or sub-group so that the entire group appropriates and directs the process. During this stage, RET’s accompaniment focuses on supporting leadership to be shared and promotes social cohesion and equal dialogue.

Another challenge is to find roles based on each person’s particular characteristics and obligations so that we stay balanced and contribute equally as a group. Responsibilities being defined through committees could be an alternative way of distributing roles.

Finally, the recent shift to being a legal organization brings new challenges that we have to learn to manage, such as the legal requirements that this new status involves, and searching for and managing our own resources.

Key Concepts

**Diversity:** Recognizing and respecting differences in all people.

**Leadership:** Individual or collective motivation and skills to encourage and mobilize groups towards changes that make an impact, whether it is in the group space or beyond it.
“I have learned to talk in front of people and to facilitate workshops on issues like discrimination, gender and sexuality. The first time was with the Migration Game in an activity for World Refugee Day. It was cool but I felt nervous”.

- Pablo -
The Path towards ACTION

LEAVING A MARK
The steps we have taken in terms of participation and forming an organization have left their mark. Our actions generate a personal and collective impact in the different spaces where we have worked.

Thanks to participation in spaces offered by socio-cultural exchange networks like Guarded [7] and Culture Viva Communitarian [8] (which bring together collectives, groups and independent people that work to promote art and culture in Costa Rica and fight for the cultural rights of communities) we made contact with several independent groups in the country, which has helped us to form networks, collaborate on projects and identify different ways and ideas of working (see graphic page 33).

[6] The Culture Viva Communitarian (Culture Alive in the Community) program promoted by the Ministry of Culture and Youth aims to facilitate intersectorial spaces in order to generate income and proposals so that public policies to promote culture are implemented in Costa Rica.
Our activities helped local authorities recognize our work, which opened up more participation spaces. As a result, in 2014 two Madiba Youth Group representatives participated in a consultation to design public policies for culture at the invitation of the Costa Rican Ministry of Culture and Youth.

We also participated in several international youth gatherings, including: “Regional Platform to Reduce Disaster Risks” in Guayaquil Ecuador in 2014; “IV Youth Forum of the Americas” in Panama City in 2015; and the Youth Declaration “We Have Something to Say” regional gatherings, organized annually by RET since 2013. To date, we have also worked with youth representatives that work with the organization in different intervention countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. [9]

During the 3rd Youth Declaration “We Have Something to Say” Regional Gathering, we shared the experiences that we had implemented, showed the impact of our actions, reviewed the results and progress we have experienced as a group and exchanged experiences and ideas with other youth leaders in Ecuador, Panamá and Venezuela. We were also able to plan our next steps, which are focused on strengthening our networks and participation.

The action plans addressed and designed in the framework of these regional gatherings cover three thematic areas:

- Participation and the good use of free time.
- Advocacy (that we also carry out with the previously mentioned initiatives)
- Livelihoods, which aims for the socio-economic integration of the group's youth participants.

Subsequently, RET held a call for applications within our group where they invited us to develop youth income generating initiatives. A total of three projects were selected with five participants from the group which were:

- Producing and selling smoothies using Colombian fruits.
- Establishing an afro-caribbean beauty salon
- Forming a musical group to play at events.

This helped those who participated in the Madiba Youth Group to access economic support as a result of working on the micro-business. This income was primarily used by young people to pay for their studies.

In addition to economic support, there was a training process (entrepreneurship, business plans, beauty salon and singing) and accompaniment by RET for the implementation of these income generating initiatives.
Our process also leaves its mark on all of the people that take part in Madiba Youth Group. This has become a space where we can develop individual skills such as self-confidence and talking in public, train ourselves on different issues, acquire practical experience (in migratory procedures for example) and meet lots of different people, with whom we share ideas, support and friendship. Socio-cultural integration and the generation of relationships doesn’t just have a place in formal spaces such as meetings, but also in recreational events such as football games and casual activities that are organized by the group’s participants.

The space we have in Madiba Youth Group also helps us to receive support, distract ourselves, and make friends. We support, guide and advise each other on a wide variety of situations, such as motivating members to continue studying or helping them to make personal decisions.
“I think that one of the main things I’ve learned is that we are all a family and we can unite and maintain a good relationship.”

- Johan -
All of the knowledge, skills, experiences and learning we have acquired and developed as part of Madiba Youth Group, as well as our interactions and the relationships that we have established, have strengthened our confidence and self-esteem. The growth we have achieved has been key for us to be able to collaborate with local authorities, businesses, organizations and people to create work networks and develop our autonomy. We even channeled our frustration caused by the discrimination that we have experienced into proposals for actions and positive energy that is always directed at achieving social transformation.
Although it is true that social inequality is so strong that it won't change easily, the different processes we have developed have had an impact on preventing discrimination, raising the awareness of refugee youth and migrants in public spaces and promoting respect for diversity and the socio-cultural integration of migrants and refugees.

The work we carry out at the community level makes people question their biases and stereotypes that are usually expressed without being questioned. Whether it is through workshops, murals or street interventions, we motivate people to rethink and reflect on their attitudes and actions.

We have appeared on radio and television programs, which helps us to raise awareness about our group and shares our message to more people at local and national levels. We also created a flyer that we distribute during events that we are involved in to promote the group and our mission.

We have continued to strengthen ourselves as a group, building our autonomy and identity. Creating our logo represented a big step in this direction. During this process we held several work sessions to gather graphic information as well as ideas that represented us as Madiba Youth Group. We didn't want the logo to be too complex, but it wasn't easy to reach an agreement because of the limited number of visual elements that communicated what we wanted, and at the same we were trying to get everyone in the group to feel happy about a logo. We didn't always reach a consensus so we made some decisions through a majority vote with an agreement that the entire group had to respect it.
“During the process to design the logo it was important to analyze how we felt about the group, the positive aspects and what needed to be improved. Debates were held and although there were people that weren’t completely in agreement, they still supported the majority’s decision”.

- Edgard -
Finally, after several attempts and adjustments, we chose Nelson Mandela’s face as the symbol. He is a symbolic person for the group and inspired our name. The young, diverse and united figures represent us and it includes the text “Madiba Youth Group”. There are three coordinated elements in a semi-circle. The gold color dominating the logo was chosen because it reminds us of the energy and strength that drives the group.

Madiba Youth Group dreams of reaching more and more people. We dream of growing as a group and to have more young people joining and participating with us to build a critical citizenry, generating partnerships with other groups and organizations in order to combine our efforts, engage in advocacy in formal politics and carry out projects outside the country’s central valley region so that the message of integration and respect for diversity can extend to more places in Costa Rica. Finally, without fear of sounding ambitious, we also dream of making an impact outside Costa Rica.
Our biggest challenge in this stage is that everyone in the group takes an active participation, become involved in the processes of the planning and discussion of ideas, and execution of projects.

For different reasons (work obligations, student and family, emotional instability, lack of commitment, etc.), there are does who aren’t constant in the group, in particular, they have been confronted by additional difficulties such as gender socialization and the spaces that tend to be masculinized, but they have been gaining record up to become more participative.

**Advocacy:** A positive impact and influence exercised on reality through actions that go beyond words and achieve real changes, both in people’s perception and their behavior.

**Agents of Change:** People that use their actions to influence positive changes in society. This includes modifying other people’s perceptions and behaviors.

**Youth Networks:** Coordinating various youth groups with different trajectories and coming from regions/countries to work together and engage in advocacy in different spaces.
“Seeing everyone’s reality has helped me to value what I have here in Costa Rica, and it also motivates me to work so that people aren’t so cruel.”

- Alex -
CONCLUSIONS

REVIEWING THE JOURNEY
Choosing the group name.

Reflecting on collective identity.

Agreeing on internal rules.

Developing and implementing projects and initiatives.

Establishing friendly relationships between the group members.

Training on issues of interest.

Recognizing our interests, differences and similarities.

Group of people interested in participating in collective activities.

[10] This section highlights the important phases for training and consolidating a group. The order corresponds to the form in which the Madiba Youth Group has evolved. However, it is important to highlight that the chronological order is not strict.
in the sense that several stages can take place simultaneously. Progress is made and there are setbacks in a process that is non-linear. Each group will have its own way of evolving.
We want to use our specific participation experiences to help other young people, based on the experience of our group, to find the means to value and enjoy their specific rights and general human rights.

The following are lessons that we have learned in the process of creating Madiba Youth Group:

Young people have to find an issue that interests them and motivates them to take action. In Madiba Youth Group we have all had similar experiences of being victims of discrimination, and that was the element that united us and motivated us to act to prevent other people going through the same situations of being rejected based on their nationality.

It is essential to provide training on issues like human rights, social integration, leadership, gender equality, discrimination and many other issues that help young people. This training helps participants understand society, the personal impact that these issues have and strengthen young people’s identities so that they can write their own story and transfer the knowledge that they’ve learnt to other people.

It is also important to develop skills for public interventions; public speaking; facilitation techniques; communication tools; and the role of the spokesperson to consolidate participants’ experience as leaders.

Every person has to actively participate in the group. To achieve this, it is necessary to understand individual characteristics, ethnicity, age and migratory situation so that the process helps strengthen young people’s self-esteem, security and self-confidence.
The group rules have to be defined collectively through agreements between members. These rules can be modified over time, based on what the group thinks is appropriate.

In order to strengthen autonomy and the group’s identity, it is essential to develop processes with greater commitment and responsibility from participants. This gives them self-confidence and contributes to their empowerment in order to exercise a greater citizen participation, always aiming for self-organization.

It is essential to form links with other socio-cultural networks and establish partnerships and collaborations with other organizations and groups. This helps to combine efforts, strengthen actions, learn about new experiences, exchange ideas, emotions and knowledge and become part of a social and collective history.

Managing virtual social networks is very valuable as it creates opportunities to reach more people, share messages and raise awareness of the work carried out. It also helps these collectives stay in contact with other groups, organizations and people to strengthen their work.

Constant self-analysis and reflection are necessary to improve the group’s work and internal dynamic.
In addition to advocating on social issues, the group also has to offer a space built on trust, support and fun so that participants are motivated and can form part of the group for a long period of time.

Once we began the formation and consolidation of our group, we realized that there is always more work to be done and that the process goes beyond a specific result. We made progress towards our objectives, but the structures of inequality continue and despite some changes being achieved, we have to be constantly taking action, working towards and searching for social transformations.

Although sometimes we are overwhelmed by exhaustion, the work has to continue while there is strength and hope. We live in a world where power relationships are unequal between different age groups and young people are seeking autonomy and independence. We also have to fight to exercise our right to participate and form organizations.

There is no minimum level of effort. Each participant, in their own way, can promote changes in the thought and behavior of people and aim for social transformation. Although we strive for something bigger, we also have to recognize the value of the small, individual and collective actions that contribute to building a more just and respectful world, which occur in the framework of micro-politics.
Madiba Youth Group’s history reflects this constant evolution towards consolidating a group. Despite the difficulties, the motivation has always kept us united and we have continued to work as agents of change to engage in positive advocacy in the communities.

This is how you build an active citizenry. Regardless of nationality or migratory status, everyone can use their capacities to make valuable contributions towards building a better society. While we continue to develop personally, we look at being young as a stage of self-management and we act as leaders our own processes seeking personal and social transformation.

The story doesn’t end here. Madiba Youth Group have made a lot of progress on our path towards action and we still have a long way to travel. A trajectory like this has a beginning but not an end, because new projects can always be implemented, reaching new people, generating new partnerships, strengthening our work outside and consolidating ourselves within.

“Utopia lies at the horizon. When I draw nearer by two steps, it retreats two steps and the horizon swiftly slips ten steps ahead. What, then, is the purpose of utopia? It is to cause us to advance.”

- Eduardo Galeano -
Recommendations RET

“Starting to move forward”
It is important for participants in the groups to get to know each other, mutually identify each other, recognize their differences and similarities and establish committed relationships based on co-responsibility that strengthen the goals that are designed together. This is a first step towards developing a collective identity. Direct accompaniment from third party (in this case RET) should always be fluid, neither coercive nor rigorous, in order to facilitate a positive space for mutual learning.

“Where are we going?”
In order for young people to actively participate, it is necessary for the project or process to be focused on young people’s needs, interests and specific characteristics. This provides the work of the group with legitimacy and authenticity and also helps ensure that the group’s members continue to be active participants. Giving young people the opportunity to personally grow and develop is essential from the start of the process onwards.
“Learning to walk”

Group leadership has to be developed and strengthened, while participants’ specific conditions and characteristics need to be taken into account so that work can be carried out by different members of the group, thus creating various roles. It is important to create conditions so that “leadership” rotates between members and is not assigned to one or a few members.

“Leaving a mark”

Maintain a dynamic that is open to participation and constantly facilitates new people integrating. For this purpose, it is necessary to work on the group’s internal dynamic so that new people are warmly welcomed and integrated into the group’s work processes.
Annex
Objectives of the Madiba Association

1. Design forms of citizen participation that include diversity and non-discrimination.

2. Develop socio-education and cultural processes related to human rights in order to integrate young migrants and refugees that arrive to Costa Rica.

3. Deliver workshops and talks to raise awareness of rights and non-discrimination related to gender, nationality, ethnicity, disability, social class, migratory status, age and others.

4. Engage in advocacy actions with public, private, government and non-government entities on issues related to youth, refugees and migrants.

5. Participate in the design of public policies and decision-making processes related to youth, refugees and migrants.

6. Establish partnerships and cooperation links with national, international, government and private institutions and organizations.

7. Form part of youth networks and collaborate with other youth organizations for the joint work.

8. Generate artistic and cultural processes at the national and international level.


10. Raise awareness among the population on how to appropriately use social networks and avoid “grooming” in order to prevent human trafficking.

11. Participation in the mass media to disseminate messages on youth, refugees and migrants.

12. Promote the country’s ecological development.

13. Raise awareness among the population of social networks and street interventions regarding discrimination based on account of gender, ethnicity, disability, social class, migratory status, age and others.
7. Form part of youth networks and collaborate with other youth organizations for the joint work.

8. Generate artistic and cultural processes at the national and international level.


10. Raise awareness among the population on how to appropriately use social networks and avoid “grooming” in order to prevent human trafficking.

11. Participation in the mass media to disseminate messages on youth, refugees and migrants.

12. Promote the country’s ecological development.

13. Raise awareness among the population of social networks and street interventions regarding discrimination based on account of gender, ethnicity, disability, social class, migratory status, age and others.
WALKING “THE PATH TO ACTION”

GESTATION PROCESS

Getting together to meet.
From games to learning.
Overcoming fears.
Sharing new stories.
Initial concern.

Restlessness that becomes action.
Need for group identity.
Define group identity: vision, mission, values.

STARTING TO WALK

In the first phases of the process, a more directive leadership is indispensable. The RET team determined what to do, how to do it and when, providing safe spaces for participation in what they could find, recognize, discuss about their experiences, understand, accompany each other and in that way overcome fears.

¿WHERE ARE WE GOING?

The processes of reflection and training were essential at this time, they are a constant in in the work of RET, where education is the central element. The process of encouraging participation and building youth networks, is progressive and requires sustained action with a concrete and clear conduction.
We became enablers.
We were constituted legally.
Influence nationally and internationally.

We became facilitators.
National and international advocacy.
We were incorporated legally.

Participants of the group are recognizing their own concerns by finding a common ground for a more coordinated and autonomous movement. From the continuous conduction their opens a space for the generation of questions, where RET staff changes to a facilitation roll and permits for the youth group progress in its consolidation through the ideas, actions and own projects.

Learning no longer depends solely on RET, it also is generated by the meeting of the group with other organizations, as well as the interest to share with other young people what they have been generated.
El CAMINO hacia la ACCIÓN
Protecting Through Education